

Lodge and Gidget's Story

First there was Lodge...



In the beginning Lodge was intended to be a guide dog for the blind, but he was really born to help people relax and put them at ease. This very light yellow Labrador Retriever is just a relaxed kind of guy! As a guide dog puppy in training, he attended regular training meetings with other dogs. While those dogs were straining at the ends of their leashes, wagging their tags and barking at each other, Lodge was perfectly content to watch or to grab a nap when there was a lull in all that walking, sitting and other training activity.

Lodge did have his share of activity as a guide dog puppy. My husband, Tom, and I worked with him routinely, helping Lodge acquire good house manners and social skills. Beginning at two months of age, he learned to take his turn, be patient and be a respectful office dog. He even stayed in the homes of other puppy raisers fifteen times during his first year. Lodge truly doesn't know a stranger, thanks in part to all this early socialization and those "sleepovers."

Lodge eventually went back to Guide Dogs for the Blind for harness training and to learn actual guide work. During the last phases of training, Lodge was "career changed" since he was somewhat dog distracted. While training in harness, it is important for these special dogs to be absolutely focused on their work and not watch the girls with another trainer across the street. Lodge was a belated present when he came home to live with Tom and me just after Christmas 2000.

When he arrived back in Colorado, I was very surprised to see a mature, sturdy fellow with a thick neck and body, not at all the puppy I had sent off to college! His personality had developed, too. We quickly learned that he was the perfect dog to role model for young guide dog puppies in training. He absolutely does not react to baby puppies and their silly behaviors. He is a great role model and even helps puppies develop a nice, even gait when out walking. He has a calming effect on both dogs and cats...well, people, too!



We began to see Lodge's potential as a therapy dog while visiting with our respective elderly Mothers in Nebraska. Our visits followed their journeys into assisted living communities and, eventually, nursing homes. We were often found sitting in a common area of a facility, surrounded by elderly residents who were drawn to this big teddy bear of a dog. Long after our visits were over and we

had returned to Colorado, staff and residents alike continued to talk with our Mothers about this special dog which had found a place in the hearts of so many folks.

Lodge was the first donor in the Blood Donor Program at Animal ER and Colorado Veterinary Specialists next door. A charter member of the program, Lodge has donated more blood than any other dog enrolled, a grand total of 8,227 grams of blood. He has helped save 18 dogs since being a blood donor. Because we live nearby, he is on the emergency list and is frequently called to donate in the middle of the night. He can quickly dash the sleep from his eyes, be driven over to the hospital, give a unit of blood, and be back home and asleep again within an hour. Since he has the universal blood type, A Negative, and is so calm during the blood draw, the staff looks forward to his visits. During one donation, Lodge gave his customary stellar steadfast performance as the camera rolled for a local TV station promotion.

Lodge earned his Denver Pet Partners, Delta Society certification as a therapy dog in October, 2003. He has many opportunities to socialize, share his gentle nature with others and maintain his superb training. Lodge is so versatile that two other Pet Partners have successfully evaluated with him as well. He is the most borrowed Pet Partner in town!



He was a popular visitor in his Delta vest at Life Care Center of Littleton (LCCL) for some time. It is easy for him to sit close to a wheelchair-bound resident, beside someone using a walker, or even on a chair for better access by a bed-ridden patient. The highlight of his LCCL experiences was visiting with a wheelchair-bound teenage girl. She wanted to take a walk with Lodge. I told her "no problem." Well, what she really meant was for Lodge to pull her wheelchair down the hall! He was happy to do it. The girl and Lodge were having so much fun, that everyone in that wing of the nursing home stopped to watch, smiling while the two paraded up and down the hallway.

Then came Gidget...



Gidget is the tenth German Shepherd dog we have raised for Guide Dogs for the Blind. From the beginning we knew she was different; sweet, loving, very quiet, and somewhat shy. She became totally reliable at an early age. The breeding department at Guide Dogs began watching her carefully by age nine months, hoping she would qualify for the breeding program. She seemed so perfect! We shared the excitement and hoped she would meet the rigorous physical requirements, then pass along her unflappable temperament as a guide dog puppy breeder.

When Gidget was old enough she was recalled to

the Guide Dogs for the Blind campus in Boring, Oregon for harness training and evaluation as a potential breeder. A few weeks passed; she looked good at the initial physical exam and was selected to be a breeder. What an honor for outstanding Gidget! The veterinary staff was additionally pleased with her temperament, hip x-rays, body size and proportions. Then the shocking news! Additional tests revealed a very serious ventricular arrhythmia; so serious was her condition that she could drop dead without warning! She was "career changed" in June 2004. The veterinary department at the Boring campus looked nationwide for more answers to Gidget's precarious health dilemma. Everyone knew that it would be dangerous to even spay her without more information.



Finally, a study of arrhythmias in German Shepherds was discovered at Cornell University Veterinary School in Cornell, New York. Cornell's staff would help find some answers for Gidget. The initial help was advice on safely spaying her. Follow-up help came in the loan of a Holter Monitor to GDB. This specialized piece of computer equipment was frequently rented out countrywide for monitoring dogs like Gidget. Gathering information on her condition would also be helpful in the research study being conducted at Cornell. The Holter Monitor, about the size of a textbook, was strapped to Gidget's back. Sensors were secured at strategic places all over her body to monitor her heart's activity for a 24-hour period. The resulting prognosis was grim. But, Gidget was able to come home to us. If Gidget lived long enough, our local veterinarian was to repeat this procedure in a few months.



Randa MacMillan, DVM, our veterinarian extraordinaire and good friend, was pleased that her veterinary hospital would have the unique opportunity to pioneer a procedure usually conducted only by specialists in a select few hospitals. Detailed directions came with the Holter Monitor. Remarkable Gidget again calmly, heroically, stood like a courageous statute as sensors were super glued to clipped areas on her skin. Later, Randa was in tears while removing the sensors. Super glue isn't meant to come loose! Gidget was a trooper!

When the Holter Monitor was sent back to Cornell for interpretation of Gidget's condition, we anxiously waited for the results. Finally! Amazing news! In Cornell's opinion, Gidget had outgrown the fragile heart condition. The results were normal. From having an externally beautiful specimen of a dog that we thought might not wake up some morning; we now had the same dog as beautiful inside! She was

perfect!

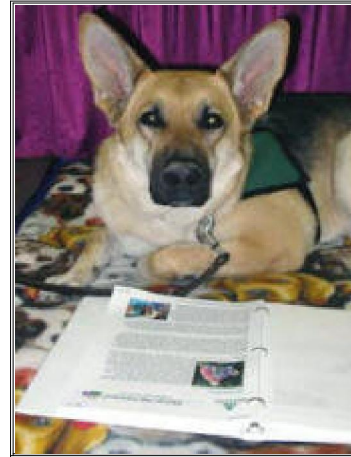
Guide Dogs for the Blind declined our offer to send her back to finish training as a guide dog. It was felt that she just had too much complicated history for that to be feasible. Tom and I then resolved to really make her unexpected good health count for something special. We launched our plan of action.

Gidget has joined the team of blood donor dogs at Animal ER. She, too, has type A Negative blood. She also lays quietly on the table during the blood draw. She has also become a Denver Pet Partners therapy dog.

A German Shepherd is often an unlikely candidate for pet therapy work because the breed has a tendency to be too bonded to one person or one family, and being friendly to strangers is often difficult. But Gidget is unique. As a guide dog puppy in training, she frequently visited the homes of others, was accustomed to being handled by other puppy raisers at training meetings, then, all that handling, poking and prodding by the many folks at the guide dog campus...what can I say?...she is a veteran at relating to people.

She was on the guide dog campus for so long, living in a kennel run, that she has a few quirks such as choosing to lay on concrete. Then, that comfy dog bed calls and she moves to its luxuriating comfort.

Both Lodge and Gidget have been reading with kids in the Arapahoe Library District since they were small puppies. (About time to get their drivers' licenses and give me a break from all that driving!) Gidget has really enjoyed her experience reading with kids at the Highlands Ranch Library each month. She enjoys children and will put her head in their lap hoping for petting and ear rubs while they are reading. Both dogs still have opportunities to participate in "Doggie Tales," at the various Arapahoe Library District locations, a monthly event initiated by our guide dog puppy raising club, Have Paws Will Travel. Although Lodge enjoys this activity, he often goes to sleep on the job. Kids have accused him of not listening. I've learned to tell them that he does his best listening with his eyes closed.



Each year Lodge and Gidget have been guests at the annual Halloween Party hosted by our Have Paws Will Travel guide dog puppy club. All guide dog clubs in the metro area are invited. Each guide dog puppy in training, career change dog and working guide, dress in costume for the occasion. Lodge will wear whatever costume is offered without complaint. What a ham!

Gidget, being a unique and beautiful German Shepherd, sometimes is asked to special events, such as the recent fundraiser for Harrison Animal Hospital. The style show, "Mutts & Models", was held in a downtown Denver nightclub. She thought the music was waaayyyy too loud, but managed to keep her ladylike behavior intact for the entire affair.

Lodge and Gidget recently saw their latest guide dog puppy project, "Bayla" leave for harness training. Now, their current focus is helping new arrival, "Labelle", learn the grace and decorum they each display so well.

Tom and I have been lucky to have had so many extraordinary opportunities and experiences with our special dogs. They keep us young. They keep us involved. They give our lives special meaning. And this is just the beginning!



Editors Note: Few people capture the essence of true selflessness like Carmen Moyer. She does not set out to be an outstanding person, she becomes one by the quality of her actions. The stories she tells of Lodge and Gidget barely scratch the surface of the moving and touching history of the remarkable efforts of many people who contributed to the unique partnership of Carmen and her dogs, especially her therapy dogs. Carmen, for your dedicated efforts in enabling Lodge and Gidget to realize previously unsuspected potential, and for the many lives that you impact with your therapy work, we proudly commend you. Denver Pet Partners is honored to have you on the team.

Diana McQuarrie